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California Postsecondary Education Commission

The Impact of Socioeconomic Factors on College-Going Rates

Factsheet

This report discusses the variation in college participation rates of students coming from schools in different socioeconomic neighborhoods. It is further broken down by gender and ethnicity, providing a detailed picture of the disparity in opportunity for students to attend college.

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The Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

Draft Commission Report

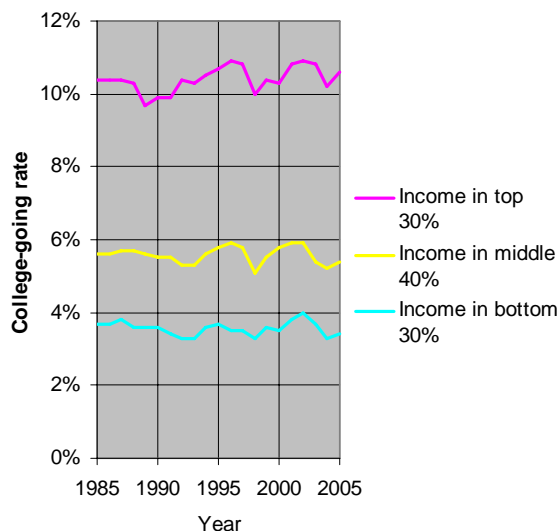
Introduction

A primary goal of California's higher education system is to provide capable students access to higher education regardless of the high school they attended, their ethnicity, their gender, or their socioeconomic status. College participation rates show that there are still significant inequities among students from different backgrounds.

This paper presents overall participation rates regardless of income level (see Display 1), followed by college-going rates of students from high schools in high-, middle-, and low-income areas.

College participation rates for California students who graduated from public high schools between 1985 and 2005 decreased from 37.4% to 29.6% at community colleges. Rates at the California State University increased slightly from 11.1% to 11.3% and decreased slightly at the University of California from 8.6% to 7.1% (see Display 1).

DISPLAY 1 College-Going Rates by Segment (regardless of income level)



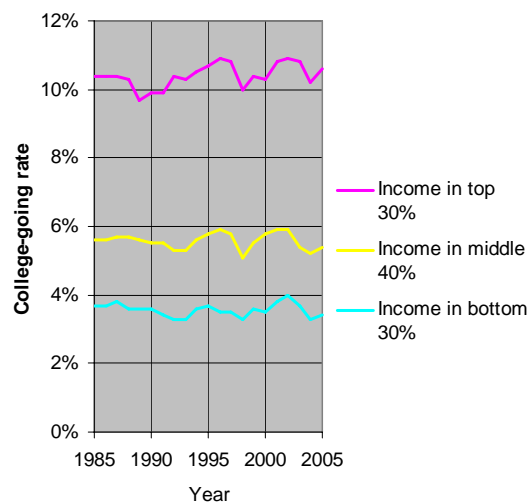
Segment Trends by Income Level

UC - College participation rates for students from schools in high-income neighborhoods have consistently been higher compared to other students, and this gap shows no sign of decreasing. In 2005, students who graduated from high-income high schools had college participation rates twice that of students from middle-income area high schools, and three times that of students from high schools in low-income neighborhoods (see Display 2).

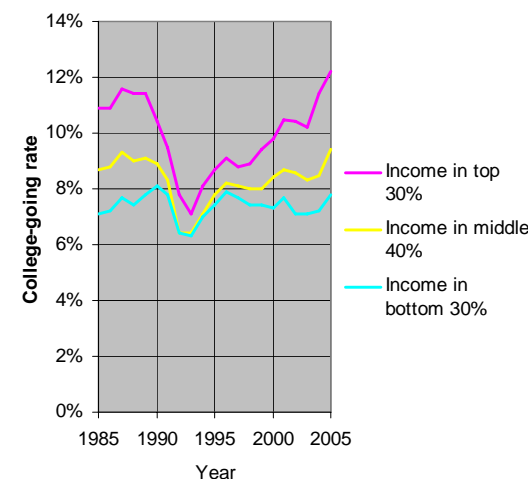
CSU - Students attending CSU campuses show a similar income gap in college participation rates, with an increasing gap between students from high schools in high-income areas, and students from high schools in middle and low-income areas. The trend was reflected in rates for 2005 where students from schools in high-income areas had a college participation rate proportionally 50% higher than schools in middle-income areas, and almost double that of low-income areas (see Display 3).

CCC - From 1985 to the mid-90's, community colleges reflected a pattern similar to the UC and CSU systems. Since the mid-90's, however, students from high schools that fell in the middle-income band began to have higher college participation rates than any of the other income groups (see Display 4). Students whose high school was in a high-income area had college participation rates that decreased by almost 20%, whereas students from high schools in middle-income areas saw a decrease of about 15%. Students going to community colleges from low-income area high schools saw the largest decline in college participation rates, with a proportional decrease of 25%.

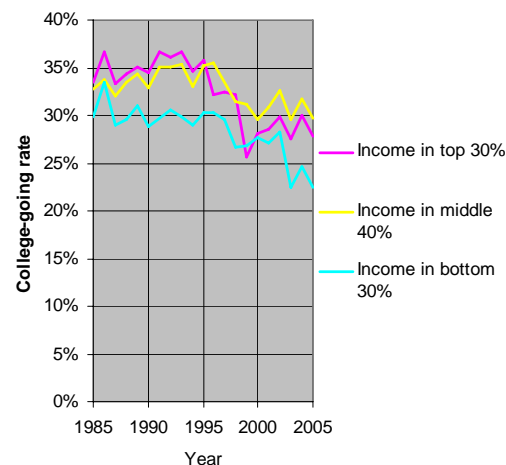
DISPLAY 2 UC



DISPLAY 3 CSU



DISPLAY 4 CCC



2005 College-Going Rates by Gender and Ethnicity

Gender

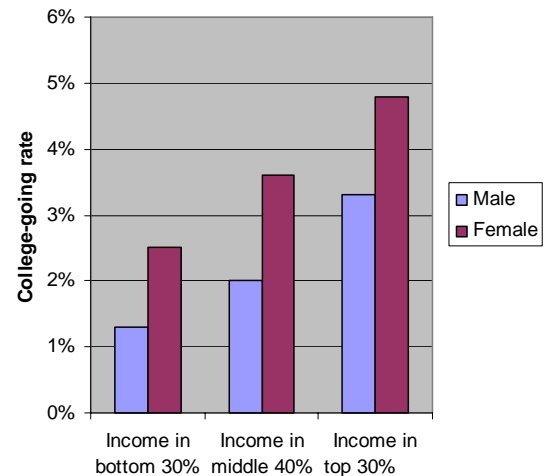
Regardless of the income level of the high school, females consistently have higher participation rates at UC and CSU. Of interest is that females from high schools in high-income areas had the highest participation rates at both systems in 2005, while males from high schools in low-income areas had the lowest rates.

2005	UC		CSU		CCC	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Income in top 30%	9.6%	11.5%	10.7%	13.6%	29.9%	25.7%
Income in middle 40%	4.6%	6.1%	7.7%	10.9%	30.7%	28.8%
Income in bottom 30%	2.7%	4%	6.2%	9.2%	22.2%	22.5%

African Americans

UC: Participation rates for African American students going to UC have decreased. This is even true for students graduating from high schools in high-income areas where college participation rates decreased by 25% between 1985 and 2005. Females from high schools in middle-income areas currently have a higher college participation rate than males from high schools in high-income areas.

DISPLAY 5 African Americans at UC (2005)



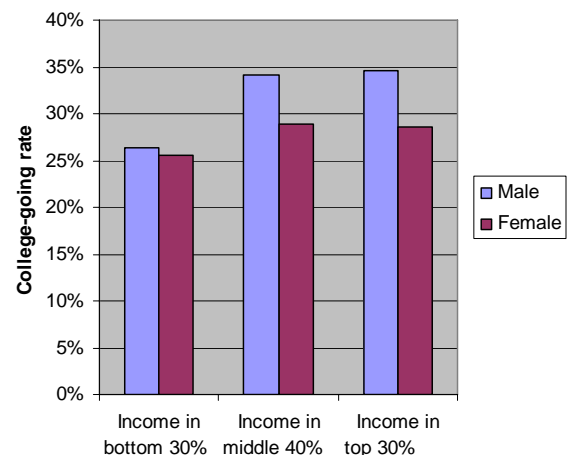
CSU: College participation rates for African American students going to CSU have increased. A significant increase was seen among students graduating from high schools in high-income areas; where college participation rates nearly doubled. Females graduating from high schools in all income areas had higher college participation rates to CSU than males from high schools in high-income areas.

DISPLAY 6 African Americans at CSU (2005)



CCC: At community colleges, African Americans from high schools in high and middle-income areas had college participation rates at 31.3% and 31.5% respectively. When rates were broken down by gender, males from high schools in high- and middle-income areas showed the highest college participation rates. High school graduates from schools in low-income areas had the lowest college participation rates at 25.9%.

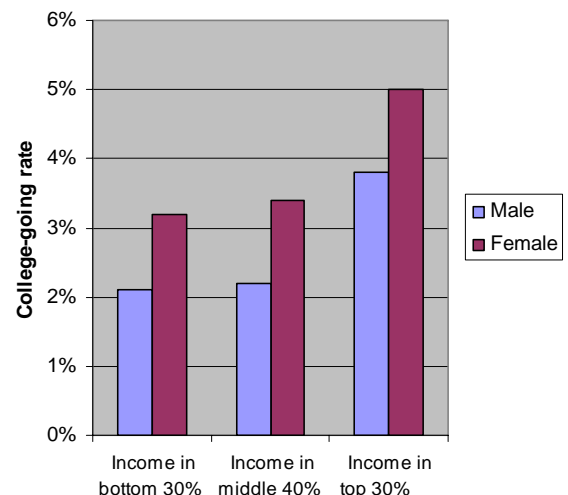
DISPLAY 7 African Americans at CCC (2005)



Latinos

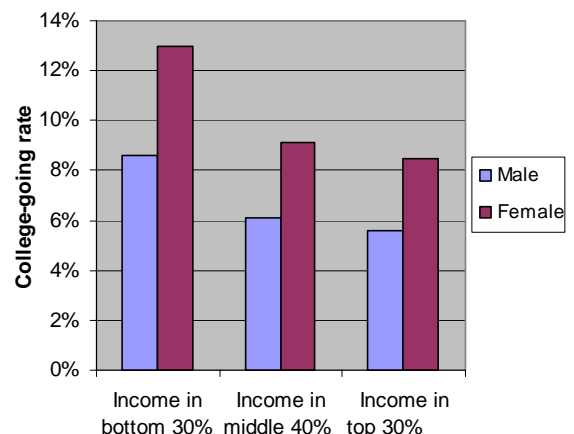
UC: Latinos going to UC from high schools in high-income areas have seen a decrease of almost 50% in college participation rates in the last two decades. Despite this decrease, students from high schools in high-income areas still have the highest college participation rate. Latinos from high schools in middle and low-income areas, on the other hand, have seen no change in their college participation rates, starting with 2.9% and 2.7% in 1985, respectively, and remaining at the exact same rates in 2005.

DISPLAY 8 Latinos at UC (2005)



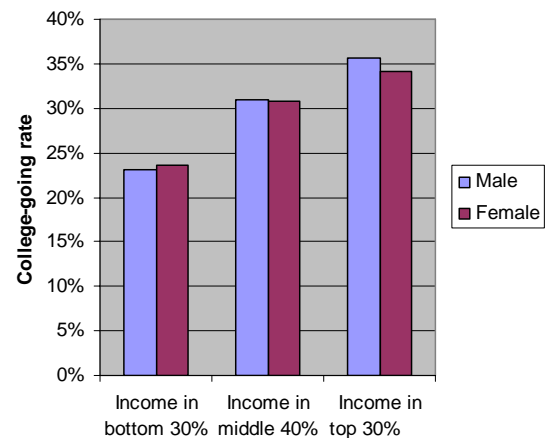
CSU: College participation rates for Latinos going to CSU increased, regardless of the average income in the high school neighborhood. Between 1985 and 2005, Latinos from high schools in high-income areas saw college participation rates more than double from 6.6% to 10.8%. Throughout the same time period, Latinos from high schools in middle-income areas saw rates increase by more than 40%, and students from high schools in low-income areas saw rates more than double.

DISPLAY 9 Latinos at CSU (2005)



CCC: Unlike other ethnic groups going to community college, Latino students graduating from high schools in high-income areas had the highest college participation rates, with a rate of 34.9% in 2005. Latinos from high schools in middle-income areas had a college-going rate of 30.9% and those from high schools in low-income areas had the lowest rate at 23.3%.

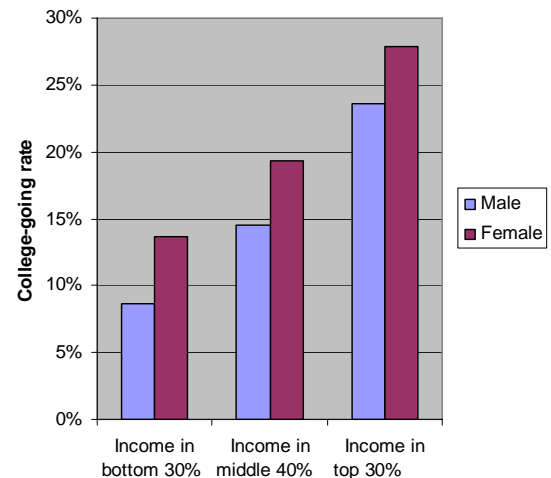
DISPLAY 10 Latinos at CCC (2005)



Asians

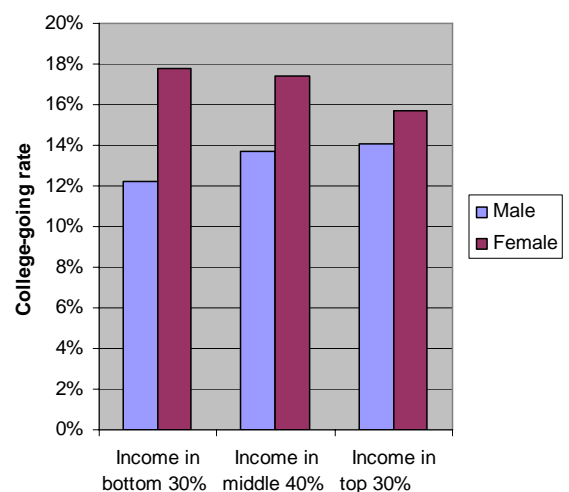
UC: Asian students graduating from high schools in high and middle-income areas increased their participation rates by 25% and 23%, respectively, between 1985 and 2005. Students graduating from high schools in low-income areas saw a minimal increase of less than one percent. A significant gender gap was seen in high schools from all income areas, with Asian females consistently participating at UC at higher rates than males.

DISPLAY 11 Asians at UC (2005)



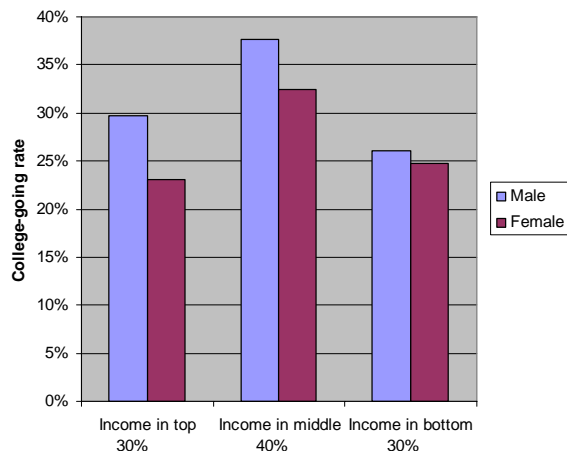
CSU: Asian students attending CSU showed little variation in participation rates compared to other ethnic groups. Interestingly, among males, those who graduated from high schools in high-income areas had the highest participation rate, whereas females who graduated from high schools in low-income areas had the highest participation rates (see Display 6).

DISPLAY 12 Asians at CSU (2005)



CCC: Among Asian students, those graduating from high schools in middle-income areas have the highest participation rate in community colleges. Compared to UC and CSU trends, Asian males have significantly higher participation rates at community colleges than females, suggesting that a growing proportion of Asian males may be choosing to attend community college instead of a UC or CSU campus.

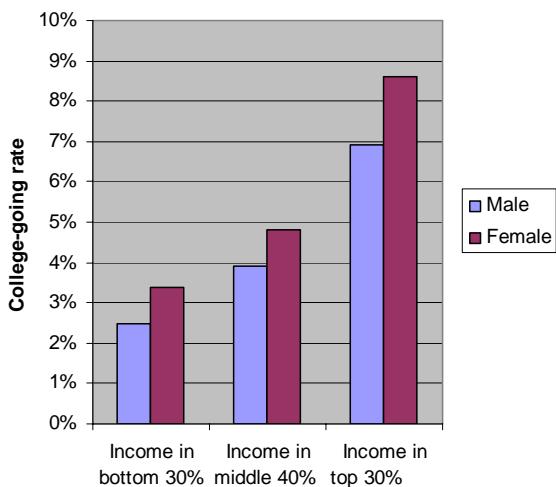
DISPLAY 13 Asians at CCC (2005)



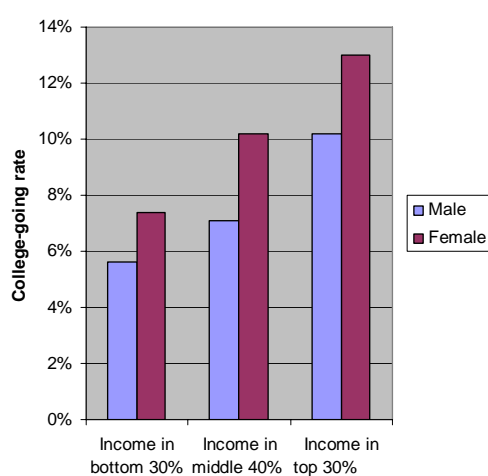
Whites

UC and CSU: White students from high schools in high-income areas have UC and CSU college participation rates of 7.7% and 11.6%, respectively, followed by White students from high schools in middle-income areas with rates of 4.4% and 8.7%. White students graduating from high schools in low-income areas had the lowest rates with 2.9% for the UC and 6.5% for the CSU systems. Females had significantly higher participation rates both in the UC and CSU systems, than did males in this population group.

DISPLAY 14 Whites at UC (2005)

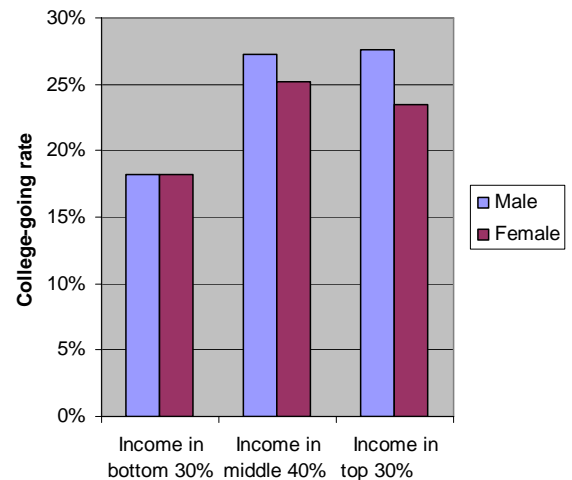


DISPLAY 15 Whites at CSU (2005)



CCC: The participation rate of White students in community college showed a large decline between 1985 and 2005. Students from high schools in low-income areas were the most impacted, and had a decline of almost 45%. The rate for White students from high schools in middle-income areas declined by 23% and those from high schools in high-income areas declined by almost 25%.

DISPLAY 16 Whites at CCC (2005)



Conclusion

Overall, between 1985 and 2005, college-going rates for students declined. Most of this decline was at the community college level. The data also shows students graduating from high schools in low-income neighborhoods are going to college at lower rates than students from high schools located in wealthier neighborhoods. When ethnic trends are examined, data show that underrepresented low-income students are impacted the most. Gender also plays a role in college participation rates. Females from high schools in high-income neighborhoods consistently outperform their male counterparts in participation rates at UC and CSU, and males graduating from high schools in low-income areas tend to have the lowest participation rates.

The data suggest that current policies and programs targeting students from high schools in low-income neighborhoods are not eliminating the gap in participation rates. What remains to be determined are the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate this gap. Further analysis is needed to determine effective and efficient policies that will improve participation rates and equity for underrepresented students, especially those from low socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Methodology:

College participation rates are calculated by dividing the number of entering freshmen by the number of public high school graduates for each year.

High schools were classified into three categories based on the average income of the neighborhood surrounding the high school: income in bottom 30% (\$44,00 and below), income in middle 40% (\$44,000-\$65,000), and income in top 30% (\$65,000 and above). College participation rates were then calculated for the last 20 years and broken down by gender, ethnicity, income and segment.

